

## STATEMENT

### **Museums for an open society: defending democratic values**

Dortmund, September 1, 2023

**The LWL Museum Zeche Zollern, a member of the North Rhine-Westphalia Museum Association, is currently facing a negative social media campaign. The association advocates democratic values and ethics in museum work.**

The background of the controversy is a Safer Space in the exhibition workshop "Das ist kolonial" (*This is colonial*), which is reserved as a protected space for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) on Saturdays between 10 am and 2 pm. This protected space is intended to offer people who have been affected by racism and experiences of violence, or who are more affected by the topic of colonialism than others, the possibility of retreat and open exchange. Admission to the exhibition workshop is not regulated. Visitors are only asked to be considerate. Usually, museum guests respond with understanding. The exhibition workshop interactively explores the thematic complex of (post)colonialism, which is also associated with violence, pain and grief. Designed as an experiment, it tests how the topic can be sensitively exhibited. The workshop also deals with (post)colonial phenomena of the present, e.g. racism.

The social media campaign can clearly be assigned to agents from the right-wing populist spectrum. The statements are detached from the original topic of the social and common confrontation with (post)colonial phenomena of the present and the exhibition contents, simplifying, unreflective, defamatory - and not infrequently openly racist.

The North Rhine-Westphalia Museum Association declares its full solidarity with the member museum LWL-Museum Zeche Zollern and especially with its employees. As an association, we stand up for a democratic, diverse and multi-voiced society. Accordingly, the Museum Association actively advocates for the inclusion and consideration of the interests of socially underrepresented groups in museum practice. Museums are not only places to engage with history and the present, they also offer space to address social problems and injustices. Unfortunately, everyday racism still has a lasting effect on our society: giving affected groups protected spaces in museums is an important contribution to making this grievance more visible and showing ways to negotiate it. The North Rhine-Westphalia Museum Association encourages all its members and stakeholders in the museum sector to defend their democratic values and ethics and to carry them forward into their work.

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